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Senate

The Senate met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, You have always been our helper. Continue to teach our lawmakers to live for Your glory.

Lord, lead them along the paths that will keep our Nation strong. Give them confidence in Your guidance and a passion for Your truth. Strengthen them so that they will be courageous in defense of righteousness. Inspire them to wait patiently for the ultimate triumph of Your prevailing providence. May they find spiritual nourishment simply by being kind to each other.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nevada.

Ms. ROSEN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, yesterday, the Senate completed an extremely productive day by confirming three members of President Biden's Cabinet. Today, we are going to keep up the pace by moving the ball forward on two more of the President's nominees.

First, the Senate will begin the process of bringing Xavier Becerra's nomination to the floor to serve as HHS Secretary. This is a critical position as we continue to battle the virus, and I am perplexed that none of my Republican colleagues would vote for him. He is a capable man, and he has worked hard to make sure that people get healthcare. Some have said: Well, he is not a doctor. Neither was the previous Trump nominee for HHS, who happened to be a pharmaceutical company executive. Whom would Americans prefer?

Second, the Senate will move forward with another very historic nominee who makes us so proud, Representative DEB HAALAND of New Mexico, to serve as the next Secretary of the Interior. She will be confirmed on Monday. Representative HAALAND was elected to the Congress in 2018. She was the first Native American woman, along with Representative SHARICE DAVIDS of Kansas, to ever serve in the people's House. If confirmed, Representative HAALAND will not only become the first Native American to lead the Department of the Interior, but she will be the first Native American to serve in any Cabinet position in American history. We have had a Vice President with Native American roots but never a Cabinet official.

Given the long and troubled relationship between the Federal Government and Tribal nations, the ascension of

Representative HAALAND to the top of the Interior Department is a profoundly important moment for America as we advance on the long road—still not fully traveled at all—toward equality. For too long, Tribal nations have been denied a seat at the table where decisions were made that impacted their lives and their land. Not only will Secretary HAALAND ensure that they get a seat, she will bring her own lived experiences to the table alongside them.

Under President Trump, the Department of the Interior became one of the most scandal-ridden Agencies in the history of the Federal Government. It gave oil and mining companies carte blanche to drill in wildlife reserves. It rolled back environmental protections and greatly undermined trust in the Federal Government and Tribal lands.

Representative HAALAND will move the Department in a dramatically different direction. One of her most important responsibilities will be to restore and uphold the Federal Government's obligations to sovereign Tribal nations. I cannot think of a better candidate to take on this job than Representative HAALAND, and I greatly look forward to confirming her. It will be historic.

Now, in general, Madam President, the Senate is making great progress in installing President Biden's highly qualified nominees. So far, we have already confirmed 16 Cabinet-level appointments. We are set to increase that number to 18 after Secretaries HAALAND and Becerra are approved. Every single one of the President's nominees has been confirmed with a bipartisan vote here on the Senate floor. President Biden deserves to have his team in place, and the Senate is moving quickly to get the job done.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, Madam President, on the American Rescue Plan,

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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which finally cleared the hurdle in Congress yesterday by passing the House, it is now only a Presidential signature away from becoming law. Soon—very soon—the most sweeping recovery effort in recent history will get underway.

Direct checks will be delivered to American families from coast to coast—roughly, 85 percent of all households. The American people can expect those \$1,400 checks for each person in the family to be delivered by the end of March, and we are making amazingly good progress on vaccines. Vaccines will be available far more quickly to far more people.

Just this morning, the Biden administration announced an expansion of the vaccine program, and I was able to announce that more than 100 community health centers in my home State of New York will be eligible to get their own, dedicated supply of vaccines. There is a brand new vaccine supercharge for New York and for some of the rest of the Nation as well—the crux: more vaccines and more sites to administer them. Over 100 sites will be set up across New York State to administer a massive influx of new shot supplies.

There is light at the end of this COVID tunnel, which has always been centered on access to a free vaccine for all New Yorkers. More access and more shots mean a quicker recovery, and that is what we want, and that is becoming available for my home State of New York and for the entire Nation.

The CHC sites, or community health center sites, will be federally funded and organized by the Department of Health and Human Services—a huge expansion. We have all heard numerous stories of people having to travel too far to get the vaccine, hampering our ability to recover and return to normal. With this announcement of more vaccines and more New York sites to administer them, New Yorkers have something to celebrate, and I thank the President for working with us to make this effort real and to bring it to every State in the Nation. Other things are happening, too.

Our schools will receive critical assistance to update their infrastructure, hire more teachers and tutors, and prepare to reopen as fast and as safely as possible.

There is going to be money for broadband. There are going to be dollars for rural hospitals. There are going to be dollars to help our Tribal nations—all who are suffering. The new RESTAURANTS Act, which is so important to so many of our States, is becoming law. More money for Save our Stages to help our arts institutions is coming.

Perhaps the thing that we are the most proud of—although there are so many in this bill—is helping people with their pensions and making sure those who are laid off still get healthcare by funding COBRA fully.

There are so many good things for average working families, but maybe

the most important of all—who knows? There are so many good things in this bill—is the child tax credit, which will cut childhood poverty in half. When a child is born into poverty at no fault of his or her own, they don't get adequate nutrition. They don't get adequate healthcare. They don't get adequate housing. They don't get adequate education. Then, when they get to young adulthood, they have nowhere to go, and then they get blamed for their plight. The better, smarter, more effective thing to do is to help them get out of poverty early so they can lead good, productive lives as citizens and as taxpayers. We are doing that for the first time here, and I hope it is something that we can continue.

Simply put, the American Rescue Plan is one of the most significant pieces of legislation to pass the Congress in recent history.

Yesterday, I started describing in more detail some of the lesser known aspects of the plan. Everyone knows that vaccines are coming, that \$1,400 checks are coming, that money for schools is coming, and now people know of the child tax credit, but there are lots of other things in this bill. Today, I want to continue by talking about another unheralded provision: assistance to Native communities. It is a topic very much on theme today given the nomination of Secretary HAALAND.

One of the most tragic features of the COVID-19 pandemic is how destructive it has been for America's Tribal nations. Native Americans have faced the highest risk of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths due to COVID-19—bar none, the highest. Early in the crisis, the Navajo Nation, to take one example, saw more cases per capita than any other State in the country. Decades of an unraveling social safety net, declining economic opportunity, an overburdened health system, and the failure of the Federal Government to honor its trust obligations to American Tribes left Native communities unequipped to handle the crisis. But in the American Rescue Plan, the Democrats will deliver the single largest investment in Native communities in our Nation's history. We are very proud of that. It is historic—the single largest investment in Native communities in our Nation's history. More than \$31.2 billion in direct funding will go to Tribes and communities to defeat this pandemic and rebuild their communities; \$20 billion directly to Tribal governments so they can stabilize essential services; \$6 billion to the Indian Health Service, not just for vaccines and testing and tracing but to improve and restore these rural, long-neglected hospitals; hundreds of millions more for Native education; \$10 million will go to just making sure communities can access clean water.

Listen to the items I just mentioned: clean water, keeping hospitals running, connecting kids to broadband. These are absolute necessities, and the Amer-

ican Rescue Plan is going to dedicate resources to all of them for Indian Country.

I want to thank a whole bunch of my colleagues. So many contributed, but the chair of the Indian Affairs Committee, Senator SCHATZ, and Senators TESTER and CANTWELL and SMITH and KELLY and BEN RAY LUJÁN and Heinrich are very, very important. Senator HEINRICH particularly pushed for broadband. So it was a team effort, and I am proud of my colleagues.

The American Rescue Plan takes us a giant step closer to fulfilling our trust responsibilities to all Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. This is just one example, an important one, as to how the rescue plan will dramatically improve the lives of millions of people in this great country of ours.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, a year ago, coronavirus cases were beginning to climb on U.S. soil. Shutdown measures were starting to take effect.

Americans have endured one of the strangest and most painful years in living memory. Nearly 2 million Americans have been hospitalized with serious cases of the virus. More than half a million have lost their lives. Millions of students and workers have had their lives completely thrown off course. But these dark times have also spotlighted some of the best of America: heroism, selflessness, ingenuity.

Last March, the night we passed the CARES Act without a single dissenting vote, I said we would see a new generation of American heroes, and so we have. Doctors and nurses and first responders have worked tirelessly to help their fellow Americans. Essential workers kept manning their posts and prevented economic collapse. Neighbors looked out for neighbors, and small businesses shifted gears almost overnight. Children and parents have fought to adapt to extraordinary disruptions, and incredible heroes in lab coats in America and worldwide worked at light speed to decode this new enemy and create lifesaving vaccines in record time.

Today, together, we are standing on the cusp of a new springtime for our